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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000264

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/01/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: IRANIAN AMBASSADOR DEPARTS BAKU EARLY

REF: A. 06 BAKU 1700

[1](#)B. 26 FEB 07 HAUGEN - NEA/IR AND EUR/CARC EMAIL

[1](#)C. 06 BAKU 1471

[1](#)D. 06 BAKU 1215

[1](#)E. Q BAKU 758

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) Iranian Ambassador Afshar Suleymani will leave his post in Baku early, returning to Iran on March 01. During an interview with ANS Television on February 25, Suleymani confirmed these reports, stating that he was leaving due to medical reasons.

[1](#)2. (C) At present, there is nothing to suggest that Suleymani's early departure can be attributed to anything other than his stated medical reasons (ref a). Suleymani reportedly suffered a serious heart attack in November 2006, requiring heart surgery and convalescent leave in Iran (ref b).

[1](#)3. (C) During his February 25 ANS Television interview, Suleymani stated that he would be returning to a position (unclear which) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Concerning a replacement, Suleymani said that Iran's Consul General to Nakhchivan, Nasir Hamdi Saridi, would be replacing him. According to the Turkish Consul General in Nakhchivan, Saridi is also an ethnic Azeri and previously served as Consul General in Istanbul (ref c).

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: Outspoken and media savvy, Suleymani figured prominently in the Baku media scene. Communicating the IRI's message to Azerbaijanis in their own language, Suleymani adeptly exploited political developments such as the Lebanon crisis (ref d) in an attempt to discredit the US and the Aliyev government's western orientation. He also provoked a very strong negative reaction from the GOAJ when he made intemperate comments about speeches regarding "South Azerbaijan" made by private citizens at an Azeri diaspora conference in Baku (ref d).

[1](#)5. (C) Comment continued: More recently, however, Suleymani appears to have moderated his public statements, saying that he "believed a war with the US to be unlikely." In addition, during his departure call with President Aliyev (to be reported septel), Suleymani reportedly told Aliyev that "the Iranian MFA seeks normal relations with the GOAJ." With little known about Saridi (who maintained a very low public profile during his Nakhchivan posting), the Embassy will closely monitor his transition at the helm. End comment.

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